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KT photo | **Tim Bath**

House of Burgess: Administration's lies consequential

'Armada' headed away from, not toward North Korea

By Rob Burgess
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Every president lies about some things sometimes. But President Donald Trump and his administration take habitual untruth-telling to new heights.

“Just over a week ago, the White House declared that ordering an American aircraft carrier into the Sea of Japan would send a powerful deterrent signal

to North Korea. ... 'We're sending an armada,' Trump said to Fox News April 11," reported The New York Times' Mark Lander and Eric Schmitt on April 18. "The problem was that the carrier, the Carl Vinson, and the three other warships in its strike force were that very moment sailing in the opposite direction, to take part in joint exercises with the Australian Navy in the Indian Ocean, 3,500 miles southwest of the Korean Peninsula."

Our allies and enemies need to believe we are telling the truth. This disregard for facts will have real consequences. Yet sadly, this behavior is baked into the 45th presidency.

As I wrote in my Jan. 25 column, "Size matters to Trump," press secretary Sean Spicer spent Jan. 21, his first full day on the job, screaming at journalists and parroting the new president's lies about the size of his inauguration crowds. Jan. 22, counselor to the president Kellyanne Conway appeared on NBC News' "Meet The Press" with host Chuck Todd and attempted to re-brand Spicer's falsehoods as "alternative facts."

As I wrote in my Feb. 8 column, "Administration's alternative history," Trump (and later confirmed by Spicer) started Black History Month by saying long-deceased abolitionist Frederick Douglass was doing "an amazing job and is being recognized more and more." Conway mentioned a fake "Bowling Green massacre" in no less than three interviews.

As I wrote in my Feb. 15 column, “More alternative history,” Spicer (also falsely) repeatedly pointed to Atlanta as a city attacked by Islamist terrorists.

And, as I wrote in my Feb. 22 column, “About ‘Last night in Sweden,’” Trump conflated a segment he saw the night before on the Fox News show “Tucker Carlson Tonight” about Sweden’s migrants with an actual terror attack.

Since then, the lies have continued to flow freely.

Feb. 28, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos released a statement after meeting with presidents and chancellors of Historically Black Colleges and Universities at the White House, calling these institutions “real pioneers when it comes to school choice.” Yes, Madame Secretary, and I bet you think slaves were real pioneers of employment choice, too.

Speaking of slavery, during his introductory remarks March 6 to the U.S. Department of House and Urban Development, Secretary Ben Carson called slaves “immigrants.” “There were other immigrants who came here in the bottom of slave ships, worked even longer, even harder for less,” Carson told the department. “But they too had a dream that one day their sons, daughters, grandsons, granddaughters, great-grandsons, great-granddaughters, might pursue prosperity and happiness in this land.”

And Spicer sailed into the subject of the Holocaust during an April 11 press conference, referring to Syria's April 4 chemical weapons attack. "We didn't use chemical weapons in World War II," he said. "You had someone as despicable as Hitler who didn't even sink to using chemical weapons." (I think I remember reading something about some camps.)

Perhaps no exchange encapsulates the administration's disrespect for observable reality more than the following during a March 10 press conference:

Eamon Javers, CNBC: In the past, the president has referred to particular job reports as "phony" or "totally fiction." Does the president believe that this jobs report was accurate and a fair way to measure the economy?

Spicer: Yeah, I talked to the president prior to this, and he said to quote him very clearly — "They may have been phony in the past, but it's very real now."

People in the room laughed. I don't find it funny.

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